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C O N F I D E N T I A L KIGALI 000124

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PINR PINS MOPS RW
SUBJECT: RWANDA WITHDRAWS FROM DRC IN COLORFUL JOINT
CEREMONY

Classified By: DCM Cheryl Sim for reasons 1.4 (b) (d)

¶1. (U) On February 25, 1300 Rwanda combat troops joined several hundred Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC) soldiers in a colorful departure ceremony in Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), witnessed by the two nations respective Foreign Ministers, Defense Ministers, Chiefs of Defense Staff and senior military officers, as well as local dignitaries, members of the diplomatic corps from Rwanda, MONUC officials, and several thousand onlookers. Arrayed in a empty field in the center of the town, the two nations's soldiers marched, saluted, paraded the colors, and played stirring anthems. At every turn, Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) and FARDC officers and men jointly took salutes, bellowed orders, and dipped the two nations's colors, all commands on the field roared in the common language of Swahili. At the end of the ceremony, the Rwandan soldiers marched in a long column from the field, along a densely crowded avenue, past stationary vehicles and applauding Goma citizens, a quarter mile to the border where they boarded RDF trucks for their home bases.

¶2. (U) The assembled soldiers also listened to speeches in from the two Foreign Ministers, Defenses Ministers and Defense Chiefs, as well as the commander of the joint military operation, Congolese General John Numbi. Every speech stirringly saluted the combined efforts of the two nations's militaries, and pledged further cooperation. General Numbi called the concluded joint operation "the first phase against the FDLR." Speaker after speaker asserted the FDLR had been left "sensibly reduced," and facing a very uncertain future. Rwandan Defense Minister Marcel Gatsinzi said the RDF "remained available for future operations." Rwandan Foreign Minister Rosemary Museminali proclaimed a "fundamental change in the security dynamics of the Kivus," adding the two nations' strength was "best achieved through unity." She called upon the FDLR to "choose life" and return to Rwanda.

¶3. (U) Congolese Foreign Minister Alexis Thambwe spoke twice, first praising the joint operations, and asserting a "common future" could best be constructed through a "durable security" established in both countries. When speaking for the final time, he offered pointed remarks for internal Congolese opponents of the joint operations. Noting politicians make "easy decisions" every day, but rarely take difficult ones, he said President Kabila had taken the very difficult decision to undertake joint operations in North Kivu with Rwanda, an undertaking which "many" had wished to

fail. The FDLR now faced a "hazardous future," and he called upon MONUC to work closely with the FARDC as the Congolese armed forces turned its operations toward South Kivu. Thambwe also carefully noted for the crowd that the RDF would need "several days" to complete its withdrawal from North Kivu.

¶4. (C) On the margins of the event, a Rwandan major who had served in the joint operations command in Goma told Embassy Kigali officers that a detailed evaluation of the operations would now be conducted by the two militaries, with a view toward joint operations in South Kivu. In the interim, he Qtoward joint operations in South Kivu. In the interim, he said the departure of Rwandan troops need not adversely affect the security situation in North Kivu, with Rwandan advisors available to assist FARDC operations in the field. Mission will offer septel on the results and future prospects of the "Umoja Wetu" (our unity) operation.

¶5. (C) Comment. The departure ceremony celebrated at every level -- from the lowest private to the most senior soldiers and officials present -- the combined operations and esprit de corps of Umoja Wetu. No one asserted a completed victory against the FDLR; rather all saluted the first successful stage of operations. Given the alternating levels of distrust and cooperation, dialogue and suspicion the two governments have shown each other over the last several years, this new-found and proudly proclaimed unity of purpose is remarkable. The two nations's armed forces, with vastly differing skills and discipline, forged a common approach to a now commonly-recognized FDLR danger. As Rwandan Foreign Minister Museminali noted, this represents a fundamental change in the security dynamics of the shared border regions

of the two countries. End comment.
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